DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 562 CS 215 636

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TITLE School/College Partnership Philosophy.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 2996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Awareness; *College School Cooperation; *Cooperative Learning; *Cooperative Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; English Instruction; Higher Education; Student Motivation; Student Participation; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Collaborative Writing; Educational Issues; University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

ABSTRACT

The issues confronting education today challenge educators on all levels and make it more imperative that colleges, school boards, and administrations work together. Collaboration on writing projects between college writers and elementary school writers, and between freshmen English high school writers and college writers at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee have proved to be valuable for everyone involved. The project began in 1988 as the outgrowth of a course called "Strategies of Academic Writing." A joint writing project defines an audience for the students involved: the elementary students or high school freshmen know they are addressing college students, and vice versa. The collaborative project also offers opportunities for editing and revision, and provides students with a sense of purpose and direction for their writing. (A list of resources available in Wisconsin and a list of workshop presenters are appended.) (CR)

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Comments by Mariann Maris
School Board President, School District of Shorewood

School/College Partnership Philosophy

In 1989, when Jean Swatek, a sixth grade teacher at Lake Bluff School in Shorewood, Wisconsin, and Mariann Maris, an ad hoc English department faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, decided to connect college writers with elementary school writers, they learned many valuable lessons about collaboration and school/university partnerships. Likewise, in 1995, when Dr. Eileen Schwalbach, chair of the English Department at Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School in Milwaukee, connected freshmen English high school writers with college writers at UWM, the experience proved to be valuable for everyone involved. What all of us have learned is that these kinds of collaborations which we will describe briefly today make teaching and learning an exciting, worthwhile experience.

The issues confronting education today, K-12 education or beyond, challenge educators on all levels and make it more imperative that colleges, school boards, and administrations work together. How do we prepare disadvantaged and at-risk youth for higher education? Whether or not our school districts are labeled "rich", how do we challenge our most talented youth? Given the restrictions on budget school boards face which seem to get more complicated each year, how do we help our teachers remain enthusiastic and intellectually vigorous about teaching? How do we provide appropriate incentive and support for those who are interested in becoming teachers? Finding answers to these questions and many other concerns facing schools today may help build and strengthen connections between K-12 schools and colleges.

We will tell you about our experiences to indicate how the division which seems to exist between schools and colleges today may be artificial and how collaboration may help us resolve some of challenging educational issues. Teaching students to be good communicators and worthwhile members of the greater community is essential if boards and educators are to convince their communities that the money they invest in public education is worthwhile. Replacing the artificial boundary that exists between colleges and K - 12 schools is a beginning.

Philosophy About Writing Collaborative Efforts

Whether students communicate using the Internet or through the exchange of letters and hard copy, a basic philosophy underlies the collaboration that has occurred between Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Lake Bluff Elementary School and UWM. That philosophy is simply that words connect people usually in ways that are uplifting and intellectually satisfying to all parties. Since our collaboration involves written communication as well as conversation, the collaboration between elementary/high school with the University has resulted in better understanding ways of communication between students, especially written communication.

What we have learned is that students, whether they are in

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the sixth grade or post baccalaureate, share certain experiences - homework, for example, and through their involvement in this project they experience those parts of being a student that they share. Writing partners learn more - that exchanging ideas and writing collaboratively is exciting. Sometimes, the collaboration leads to experiences that extend beyond the focus for the course. For example, one semester, one of my college students was a member of the UWM Panther men's varsity basketball team. As a result of the collaboration involving this player, we sent a letter to parents of all the sixth graders inviting them to attend a basketball game with their child. Even though the logistics didn't work out, the connection between this basketball player and his partner which prompted the invitation in the first place is one example of how the writing project gets students involved on many levels.

Because words do connect people and because it is as important for college students as it is for elementary/high school students to experience how words do bring people together, we are able to design writing and communication projects that are valuable for everyone. Enthusiasm, energy, and commitment are important ingredients if the collaboration is to succeed. Jean Swatek and Eileen Schwalbach have these qualities in abundance - as you will soon discover for yourselves.

Purpose for Collaboration

Learning how to write is an ongoing, lifelong process. Yet, there are certain features of writing that remain the same - for example, most writing is addressed to a specific audience, most writers find it necessary to edit and revise before they feel comfortable with it. A joint writing project defines an audience for the students involved. Opportunities for editing and revising writing are built in to the collaborative project. The sixth grader or the freshman in high school knows the audience for his/her writing is a college student; conversely, college students' writing addresses a younger audience. Knowing that a specific person will be reading the writing, writers take their writing more seriously - after all, a real person, other than the teacher reads the message. This understanding provides student writers a sense of purpose and direction for their writing. In the handouts, there are some reflections written by students involved in the project. Please take a look at them.

A Brief History of the Project

In 1988 when I was a parent of elementary age children and not yet on the school board, I taught a course at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee titled **"Strategies of Academic Writing"**, a writing course required for education majors at UWM. I enthusiastically prepared a syllabus for this course which I was teaching for the first time. I thought what I did in the course would be meaningful to students because the activities contained reading and writing tasks that would allow me to share with my students lessons and insights too numerous to mention that I had acquired in many years of teaching elementary, high school, voc-tech, and college writing classes. I thought I was doing a good job until I asked students for a mid-term evaluation. To my

dismay, I discovered that, because they lacked experience with the writing strategies we were dealing with, they were bored and confused by the course; they thought of it as just another hurdle the University put in their way before they could start practice teaching.

As I told my friend and collaborative colleague, Jean Swatek, who is here today, when we spoke way back then about writing collaboration, I was teaching a deadly dull course and looking for a way to breathe some life into it. Jean, who could be no other way if she tried was enthusiastic about engaging in a pilot project. I should mention that even though I no longer teach the course, other teachers from the English Comparative Literature Department at UWM continue to collaborate. A number of writing projects enable students to collaborate and practice a variety of writing strategies.

As is often the case, collaborations like ours are one-on-one.

> "Most ...partnerships are local, grassroots efforts....In contrast to the more traditional ways in which colleges and universities relate to schools, these partnership programs tend to be less one-directional, less hierarchical" (Lambert & Wilbur, Linking America's Schools and Colleges, 1).

Even though our project remains a local, grassroots effort, it has expanded.

One day, about a year ago, Dr. Eileen Schwalbach showed up at my door with article in hand about a collaborative project in Montana and a request that we attempt a collaboration with Milwaukee Trade and Tech.(See **"Writing Partners: Expanding the Audience for Student Writing"** in the packet of materials distributed this morning.) This article and our meeting led to another one on one collaboration between one instructor at the University and one 9th grade instructor at Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School. The project though in its infancy is beginning to take on a life of its own and Dr. Schwalbach will talk about that following Mrs. Swatek's presentation. Dr. Schwalbach will tell you about grant money that Trade and Tech received from Applied Power, a local company, to buy computers for students who are involved in this project to use.

Conclusion

Mrs. Swatek and Dr. Schwalbach are here to provide specific information about their specific programs. Without their constant commitment and involvement, collaborations like these would not survive. Speaking as a Shorewood School Board member, I must tell you that we are very proud in our district to have a teacher like Jean Swatek. Likewise, Milwaukee schools benefit immeasurably through the efforts of Dr. Schwalbach and are the motivating force behind the success of the Milwaukee Trade and Tech collaboration. Your efforts are appreciated and now, Mrs. Swatek.

Bibliography and Other Resources

Cummins, Jim and Dennis Sayers. Brave New Schools: Challenging Cultural Illiteracy Through Global Learning Networks. St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995. ($23.95)
(*Note: For an excellent review of this book, take a copy of the Winter, 1995, Vol. 10, #2, issue of Rethinking Schools available at this workshop. In the opinion of the reviewer, Bob Peterson, this book "contains one of the clearest, most helpful guides to the Internet....")

Cookman, Joyce McMahan, Program Coordinator, **"Senior Partners in Education"**, Family Literacy Center, Indiana University, Smith Research Center, Suite 150, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698 or e-mail: jcookman@indiana.edu.
A pen-pal program established by Indiana University, the program matches adult writers with junior partners. Annual fee of $12 covers the cost of matching partners.
Located through "Net Search."

Peterson, Bob. "Crossing the Boundaries of Difference: Enriching Classrooms Via the Internet." Rethinking Schools, Vol. 10, #2, Winter, 1995.

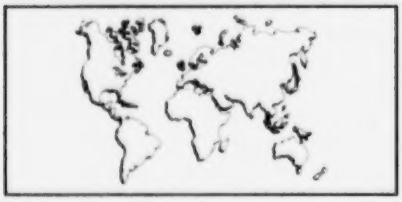
***There are a number of Web sites, in fact too numerous to mention in this handout, listed on the Net using "School College Collaboration" for the search.

Workshop Presenters

Schwalback, Dr. Eileen. Chair, English Department, Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School, 319 West Virginia Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53204, (414)271-1708, EXT 1708, FAX 271-7415

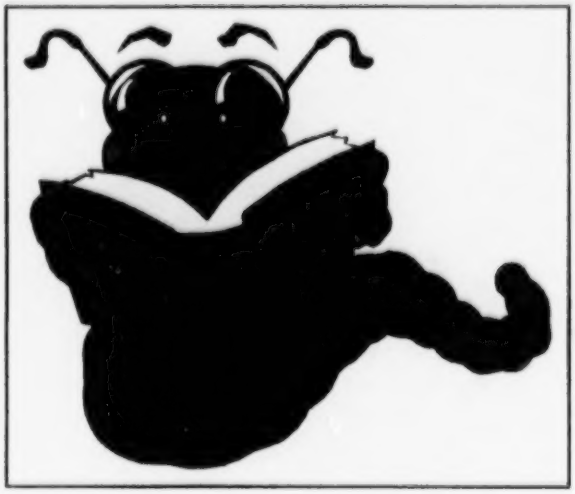
Swatek, Jean. Lake Bluff Elementary School, 1701 E. Lake Bluff Blvd., Shorewood, WI 53204 (414) 963-6972, FAX 963-6904.

Maris, Mariann. English Comparative Literature Department, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, Curtin Hall, P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201 (414)229-4152,
FAX e-mail sarim@csd.uwm.edu.



"The information superhighway offers unprecedented opportunities for educators to create collaborative learning environments that will stimulate critical thinking skills and academic excellence among all students" (Brave New Schools (15).

Resources Available in Wisconsin



Source: Lambert, Leo M. and Franklin L. Wilbur. Linking America's Schools and Colleges: Guide to Partnerships and National Directory, American Association for Higher Education and Anker Publishing Co., Inc., Boston, MA., 1995 Second Edition

"For Educators"

1) **St. Norbert College**, DePere: Menominee/Oneida Teacher Preparation Program. College level collaboration: Tribal members enroll in a four year teacher certification program designed to increase the number of competent Native American K - 12 teachers.

2)**University of Wisconsin - Oskhosh**, Educational Services Center Provides diagnosis and remediation for learners at all levels to enhance the quality of teacher education programs and service to the community.

"For At Risk Students"

1) **Mount Mary College**, Milwaukee: Head Start partnership with Milwaukee Area Health Education Center. College students enrolled in dietetics, social work, and occupational therapy gain clinical experience in culturally diverse Head Start programs.

2) **St. Norbert's College**, De Pere: "American Indian Summer Math Camp" Residential enrichment project for 30 eighth grade students from American Indian tribes throughout the United States. Summer camp is followed by a year long project involving local teachers and college faculty members.

3) **University of Wisconsin Centers**, "University Camp/Math-Science Project" Introduces minority students to college and maintains contact with them through their high school experience. Students selected attend a one-week summer program where college faculty introduce them to college academics. College students and graduates act as role models. Students come from Milwaukee and Waukesha schools.

"Programs for Educators"

1) **Alverno College**, "DeWitt Wallace-Racers Digest New Pathways to Teaching Careers" Alverno college and the University of

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Wisconsin-Milwaukee work with the Milwaukee Public Schools over a four year period to assist 50 students to quality for teaching licenses. Targets minority candidates who are emergency-licensed teachers or are educational assistants. Provides them with scholarship assistance and academic support.

2) **University of Wisconsin - Whitewater**, "Beginning Teacher Assistance Program" The longest, continuously operating, university-based mentoring program for teachers in the United States, this program brings together personnel and resources of the university and beginning teachers from small to medium schools districts with the Wisconsin Improvement Program. Facilitates beginning teachers' transitions from education student to professional teacher. Trained mentors and beginning teachers attend monthly meetings at the university.

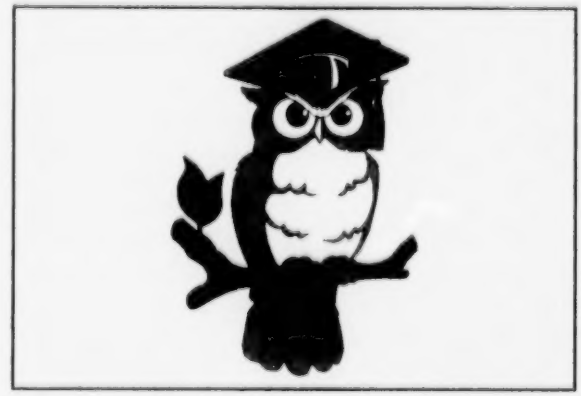
"Programs Aimed at Restructuring"

1) **Alverno College**, Milwaukee (Restructuring Assessment), "Assessing Learning" in partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools. Involves teams of teachers in a two-week summer institute, followed by a year of follow-up assistance in their schools. Seeks to develop a team of teachers at the middle and high school levels who have knowledge about performance assessment as well as an ability to work and communicate with students and staff members. Emphasis: Development of strong communication skills among young people.

"Programs Involving Technology and Alliances"

1) **University of Wisconsin Centers**, "Distance Learning" - The Rock County Center offers classes in arts, sciences, and the humanities to serve the general adult population and K - 12 teachers. High school students can take postsecondary courses via distance learning. For younger students, a nine-day summer College for Kids offers academic and arts experiences.

2) **University of Wisconsin - Whitewater**, "Ameritech-Whitewater Curriculum Integration Project" uses telecommunications technologies to develop a thematic approach to the K - 12 curriculum; involves 24 teachers from eight school districts who spend a year working with university faculty to develop a multidisciplinary approach to classroom instruction. Teachers are linked through the Internet and a local electronic bulletin board to share multimedia curricular materials.



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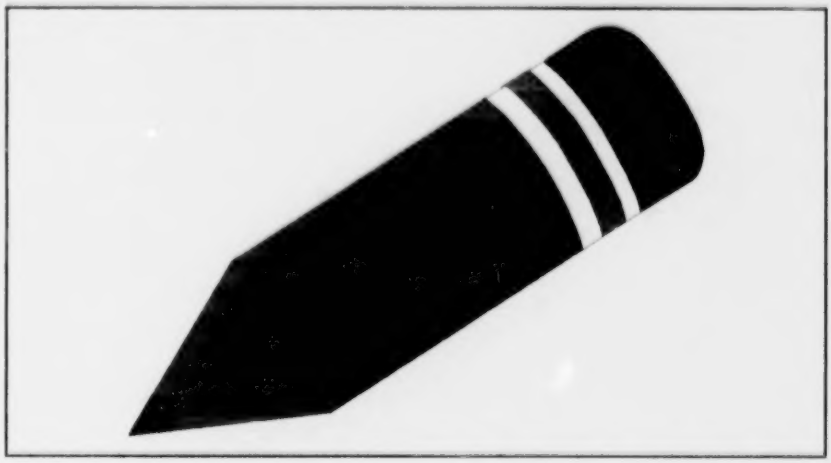
"Programs for Business Partnerships"
(*See attached sheet regarding a W.H. Brady Co. Educational Partnership with Glen Hills Middle School which is not referred to in Linking America's Schools.)

1) **University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh**, "Partnerships for School Improvement" develops an approach based on the seven forms of intelligence to establish a common vision for education and a set of community values, to develop specific quality training to enhance change, to define the leadership structure for educational change, and to developa plan to upgrade and finance technology needs in the schools. Program serves Oshkosh community, area businesses, K - 12 schools, UW - Oshkosh, Fox Valley Technical College, and elected officials.



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